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AUSTRALIA & JAPAN: A MODEL FOR MODERN FRIENDSHIP

Introduction

Today's relationship between Australia and Japan is built on solid foundations. As two countries sharing the principles of democracy, free markets and global integration, there are many aspects of economic, security and development policy on which our interests coincide.

Today I would like to discuss two significant but quite separate issues to the relationship. Firstly, I will discuss the importance of language skills for Australia's international competitiveness and to ensure we maintain our place in the region as a modern, thriving economy alongside Japan. Later, I want to speak about the potential for Australia and Japan to cooperate in capacity and peacebuilding operations to make our region more secure and prosperous.

Australia's language crisis

Australia is at present experiencing what many describe as nothing other than a 'language crisis'. Indeed, a recent report by Australia's Group of Eight (Go8) Universities is titled *Languages in Crisis: A Rescue Plan for Australia*. It states that:

“Urgent action is required if Australia is to avoid the serious educational, national security and economic consequences of becoming monolingual.”¹

I repeat: national security and economic consequences. There is probably nothing more important in Government than strong and effective public policy in these areas.

So what is the current situation? What is so serious about Australia’s current language skills crisis and what does it mean for Australian business, our economic competitiveness and national security?

At present only 13.4 percent of Year 12 students undertake of a foreign language. In total, only half our school-aged population has received any form of foreign language education.² By way of contrast, in Finland it is compulsory for school children to study three languages, while in the Netherlands, 99 per cent of Year 12 students are learning a second language.³

Furthermore, Professor Tim Lindsey - director of the Asian Law Centre at Melbourne University - observes that Australian school students rank second last out of OECD countries in terms of time spent learning a second language. And worse still our position is declining.⁴

The Go8 report notes that over the last decade, the number of languages offered in our universities has dropped from 66 to 29.⁵ Asian language study – which I wish to focus upon today – constitutes less than 3 percent of this total of 29 available at tertiary level.⁶

The Asian Studies Association of Australia has collected data between 2001 and 2004 that shows for that period – university enrolments in Indonesian fell by more than 15 percent. They also report Australian university enrolment drops in Hindi, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese.⁷ Indeed they observe that Japanese fell by 5 percent.⁸ Whilst the figure for Japanese language

students is not as dramatic a drop as some of the others, Professor Peter Drysdale of the ANU's Japan Research Centre makes the observation that there has been a large increase in the number of international students studying in Australian universities who are undertaking Japanese language study.

It must be noted that in some major metropolitan universities overseas students are making up 70 percent of Japanese language classes.⁹ Obviously this is no criticism of the levels of international students, but it certainly dilutes the statistic mentioned previously for the purposes of assessing Australia's own long-term Japanese language skills base.

So, currently we have a situation where the global economy is extending into a wide range of new, diverse and growing international markets – many of which lie in our own immediate region of East Asia. Yet this unprecedented level of international interaction is being met by an Australian language skills capacity and diversity which has been dramatically declining.

It has not always been this way. The National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Scheme of the mid 1990's – which was a Labor initiative, indeed Kevin Rudd himself as a Queensland public servant in 1994 penned the report that laid the basis for this scheme – effectively doubled the total number of Asian language learners in Australian schools.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this program was axed by the Howard Government in 2002.

So how does this language crisis translate into tangible and measurable effects?

Economic-Commercial

The Go8 universities report argues that Australians and other monolingual English speakers are increasingly competing for jobs with people around the world who are just as competent in English as they are in their own native languages - if not bilingual then in many cases multilingual.¹¹

Indeed, the report refers to an EU publication titled *Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, which provides some sobering analysis of the negative effects of language deficiencies on businesses in Europe. It notes that:

“A significant percentage of Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across the EU and wider Europe are losing export business through a lack of language skills.”¹²

Furthermore the report also concluded that:

“English is an important language as the world business language, but other languages are used extensively as intermediary languages and businesses are aware of the need for a range of other languages in relationship building.”¹³

Additionally, the Go8 report also warns of the possibilities for business and commerce to move offshore in search of more competitive language skills. The particular example given in the report is of Amazon.com-UK moving a major customer service centre to Ireland because it had an 11 percent higher number of inhabitants who could speak a second language.¹⁴

The stated concern of language shortages is not just Eurocentric. It is shared in Australian business circles. As noted in the Ten year education blueprint – *Skills for a Nation 2007-2017* produced by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCII) which states that:

“To effectively participate in a globalised world there should be the compulsory learning of a foreign language from 7 years of age or earlier.”¹⁵

Additionally, the Australian born former World Bank President James Wolfensohn also said that:

“In terms of population and economic growth, the whole orientation of the planet is moving to Asia”... It is crucial Australia not only maintains its traditional ties to the US, Britain and Europe, but to recognise this shift to Asia. We must invest in an Asian future.”¹⁶

In short the reduction in funding of Asian languages has been the ultimate example of a policy that may at first blush appear penny wise but unquestionably is pound foolish in terms of limiting long term opportunities.

National Security

It is not being melodramatic to suggest that Australia's language deficiency limits our national security capability. The Flood Report into the Australian Intelligence Agencies of 2004 stated that:

“Language proficiency represents another core competency for the Australian Intelligence Community [AIC]. Many of the agencies lack depth in this area, a weakness that reflects generally poor levels of formal foreign language training in Australia.”¹⁷

Furthermore, in 2006 - disturbingly - there were less than a dozen Arabic speakers working for our domestic intelligence and security agencies.¹⁸ Additionally at a Senate Estimates Committee Hearing in 2005, the Director of the Office of National Assessments Peter Varghese revealed that it had proved difficult to recruit skilled Indonesian linguists for a range of established positions.¹⁹

This is particularly concerning given that over the next 3 to 5 years ASIO will almost double in size, and will inevitably compete with rest of the Australian Intelligence Community for a shrinking pool of national language resources.

In January 2005, the US Defense Department produced a report titled *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, which stated:

“Language skill and regional expertise are not valued as Defense core competencies yet they are as important as critical weapons systems”²⁰

This frank acknowledgement by the world’s most advanced military only serves to compound the urgent need to rectify the language deficiency which Australia now faces.

In many ways the issue can be compared to the massive investment in science and maths education after the USSR launched sputnik in the late 1960’s. Keeping abreast of technological developments was seen as vital to national security. Today’s threat of terrorism means that intelligence in all its forms is vitally important. Language comprehension is the most fundamental element of intelligence capability.

I assure you now that a Rudd Labor Government will be enormously committed to turbo charging Australia’s language skills base for the sake of both our international economic competitiveness and our national security.

Japanese international leadership

Before I deal with the second key issue I flagged earlier – that is of a partnership in regional capacity building - I’ll briefly address some areas in which Australia has much to learn from the creative and well-planned policies of Japan. Tokyo has indeed been a role model for the world, not just Australia, particularly the case in the fields of climate change, disarmament and non-proliferation.

The fact is that Japan has been a leader in responding to climate change as far back as 1967, when the Government instituted the Basic Law for Environmental Pollution and the Japanese business sector began exploring technology and production equipment that would prevent pollution. Not only has Japan used this long history of awareness to its own advantage achieving

a 37 percent improvement in energy efficiency over 30 years, but it has also led the way internationally.²¹

Most notably, Japan's contribution to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol and subsequent implementation of its targets set an example for other countries to follow. Japanese programs to assist developing countries with climate change are also a commendable initiative.²²

Labor firmly believes accession to the Kyoto Protocol is vital, not only because of the system it establishes but also to empower a country to fully participate in any amendment or update. As the Australian Government's own submission to the UNFCCC states, the rights of countries in the position of Australia "would not include a right to vote" on Kyoto Protocol discussions.²³ This is one of reasons that the Labor Party has firmly committed to signing Kyoto. We would also endeavour to lead the climate change debate as good international citizens, alongside responsible countries such as Japan.

Climate change itself presents a challenge for national security. A number of eminent persons have drawn a clear link between the two, including a panel of eleven retired US Generals and Admirals, and the current British Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup. Former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett also made clear her view on the national security implications of climate change, stating that:

"this is a global problem with devastating global effects. And that's why foreign policy departments, treasury departments and defense and security departments are getting engaged. That's why on the direct instructions of our Prime Minister – the UK's recently made it one of our top strategic international priorities".²⁴

The watershed 2006 UK Stern Review highlighted fact that impacts of climate change will have a significant and disproportionate effect on the world's poorest countries – not few of which are in Australia's own backyard.

“The poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem... Their low incomes make it difficult to finance adaptation. The international community has an obligation to support them in adapting to climate change. Without such support there is a serious risk that development progress will be undermined.”²⁵

The potential international security implications of global warming in the Asia Pacific should not be underestimated. That is why, if elected, Labor would bring a proposal to the next Trilateral Strategic Dialogue to commission a Trilateral Climate Change and National Security Assessment with Japan and the United States. The Assessment would identify the major security threats to the Asia Pacific brought about by projected global warming. It would be carried out by security agencies from all three countries, working together in consultation with countries in the region that are most exposed to the security risks of global warming.

It may be that coordination for the assessment can be significantly assisted by one of the existing US strategic institutions based in Hawaii that focus on the Asia Pacific such as the East West Center or the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies. Japan’s experience and leadership on climate change, along with our close security partnership, would make the TSD an ideal venue to produce a report with practical recommendations for building regional capacity to mitigate these threats.

In the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, Japan also provides a glowing example for Australia to follow. The Japanese people are the only victims of nuclear weapons. It is tremendously admirable that they do not want anyone else to suffer that fate. Japan is leading the way and has heavily prioritised developing better international benchmarks for non-proliferation, contributing to the 2005 NPT Review Conference and calling on the international community to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force early. The Japanese Government has also actively campaigned for

the adoption and national implementation of the existing framework, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).²⁶

In particular, Japan's involvement in the Six Party Talks on North Korea, support of the Proliferation Security Initiative and lobbying for Asian countries to strengthen IAEA safeguards have contributed significantly to security and stability in our region. Once again, a Labor Government would build on the work of the Keating Government's Canberra Commission to assist Japan in its efforts to achieve international consensus on such important issues. It is for all of these reasons that Labor supports Japan's bid for inclusion as a Permanent Member in any future UN Security Council reform.

In other areas, there are already significant links in place. The most tangible example is the enormously successful bilateral trade between our countries. Australians recognise that trade with Japan is critical to our economic success. Japan accounts for 19.8 percent of Australian exports making it our biggest market.²⁷ Recognising the significant trade relationship that Australia and Japan already enjoys, a free trade agreement between the two countries would be a positive step in the relationship so long as the negotiated FTA is comprehensive and is consistent with WTO conventions. While there are sensitivities on both sides, it is important that both parties approach this in an ambitious and frank manner, with all relevant chapters put on the table in order to achieve a high quality agreement.

A second example of strong cooperation is in the field of security. Japanese and Australian Defence personnel have proven how effective joint security operations can be, from the heavy commitment both countries made to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia to our close cooperation in East Timor and Iraq. It is important to acknowledge that regardless of our broader policy positions on Iraq, Labor joined the Government in applauding the way that JSDF and ADF personnel complemented each other in our joint mission in Iraq's Al Muthannah province. It has created a valuable platform for future operations within our own region.

There is also broad agreement that the new Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation will bring many benefits, not only for the ADF but for regional security as a whole.

However, Labor believes that this security relationship could be taken much further. This year's Australia-Japan Ministerial Joint Statement expressly mentioned:

“explor[ing] opportunities to develop and enhance regional capacity in peace keeping and peace building including through joint capacity building activities for third country nationals, and through promoting exchange of personnel in the region”²⁸

It is opportunities for our countries to develop peace keeping, peace building and capacity building that I would now like to discuss.

Peacebuilding: Why does it matter?

One of the most pressing challenges for development, economic growth and international security is how to rebuild states that have suffered conflict, community upheaval and a breakdown in the rule of law. The long term intention must obviously be to prevent future conflict from occurring. Australians are all too familiar with examples of recurring conflict in our own region, from the multiple military deployments in East Timor to the recent recurrence of violence in the Solomon Islands. The violence occurring despite the presence of the international RAMSI mission.

A number of bodies have been established around the world by national governments and multilateral institutions in order to develop the tools that are necessary to conduct effective, long term peace and capacity-building operations. The United States has created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, with the mission statement to “lead, coordinate and institutionalise the US Government civilian capacity to prevent

or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilise and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy.”²⁹

The UK has developed a similar body called the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit³⁰ and in 2005 the United Nations created a Peacebuilding Commission as a result of the reforms initiated during the world body’s 60th General Assembly session.³¹ I note with great pleasure that Japan has recently been elected to chair the Commission in its second session.³² APEC has also just established a Project Management Unit to coordinate the more than 250 capacity-building projects valued at more than US\$18.5 million across the region.³³ These initiatives constitute a broad recognition on both a national and international level that governments need to be internally coordinated, civilian and military personnel need to be trained under compatible standards and comprehensive strategies need to be developed before effective peacebuilding can take place.

Japan and Australia: partners in peacebuilding

In keeping with its multilateral foreign policy credentials, Japan has played a large role in the development of peacebuilding institutions. It was a founding member of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, playing a leading role in its management and coordination. It has made substantial contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund. On the closely related issue of human security, Japan has also demonstrated its proactive approach to developing the international debate through its contributions to both doctrine and implementation.

For some years now Japan has placed diplomatic emphasis on the concept of human security. This has involved directing international attention to protecting people from threats to their lives, livelihoods, dignity and fulfilment. It has the goal of seeing human security recognised as “a complement to conventional state security”.³⁴ As part of this effort, Japan worked with the UN to establish the Trust Fund for Human Security, contributing around 29 billion

yen to date. The Fund has supported 148 projects at a cost of US\$203,724,346, including 43 projects in the Asia-Pacific region alone. Japan also has a number of programs making a valuable contribution to building international response capacity for natural disasters.

In a speech last year, Japanese Foreign Minister Aso announced a major new initiative for regional peacebuilding. Japan is now set to become a global leader by creating *terakoya*, or regional schools to train peacekeeping specialists. The *terakoya* would provide a range of training programs from short-term courses to full academic degrees, bringing internationally-renowned instructors to lecture. The courses would cover all areas from coordination with security, aid and government sectors during peacekeeping operations through to development of government administration and legal systems in the long term. Not only students from Japan would be eligible, but also participants from all over the region including the countries which might require peacebuilding operations themselves.³⁵

Japan has recognised the need to build up a strategic reserve of highly-skilled peacebuilders who are able to contribute to short and long-term capacity building projects in a variety of environments. Labor is highly supportive of this proposal. We believe that in further strengthening our modern friendship Australia should join Japan for the heavy lifting on what will be the key to creating long-term stability, democracy and growth, or in Minister Aso's words an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'³⁶ in the Asia-Pacific. To this effect, I launched the idea last year for the creation of an Australian Centre with many of the same characteristics as the *terakoya*.³⁷

An Australian Centre would work to develop joint doctrine and training between Australian Government Departments, NGOs and the private sector. It would also provide an opportunity for participants from developing regional countries to learn governance skills and become a hub for academic discussion and policy development. Just as importantly, it would work with similar institutions such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission on a multilateral level and the Japanese *terakoya* on a bilateral level.

Together, the Australian and Japanese institutions could create a network of governance and peacebuilding training across our region. This would be an enormous step forward and would hopefully serve as a template for effective cooperation amongst other countries. It would also provide an opportunity for Australia and Japan to support the US Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a program to ensure that there is a dedicated pool of peacekeepers in every region that are able to respond to situations as they arise. The Japanese and Australian Centres would be a tremendous addition to the infrastructure needed for our effective contribution to the GPOI.

As General John Abizaid, former commander of US forces in the Middle East said recently in Canberra:

“there is no easy solution out there to the problems we face in the 21st century... they're not only military problems that we face. They're economic, they're diplomatic, they're political and we've got to learn how, on an international basis, to bring all that power together in a positive way. And I think that we can do that but we need to do that better”³⁸

It is universally acknowledged that poverty, ignorance and lack of opportunity provide fertile grounds for terrorists. They enable international terrorism to leap borders and establish new frontiers to threaten civilised societies. By this measure, the Asia-Pacific region constitutes a myriad of potential launching pads against the interests of both Japan and Australia. By pooling our resources and establishing effective regional peace and capacity building, our countries can turn these launching pads into stable hubs of economic growth and regional trade.

This would not only address the security threat, but provide enormous opportunities for growth in the countries receiving assistance as well as the countries providing it. For all of these reasons, a Labor Government would

bring regional peace and capacity building to the top of the priority list in our bilateral relationship.

Whaling

The Australia-Japan relationship is now closer than it has ever been. In this context, it is entirely appropriate that we should be frank about resolving areas of disagreement. I would therefore like to finish by briefly explaining Labor's position on whaling.

Across the Australian political spectrum, there is bipartisan opposition to continued whaling for commercial or scientific purposes. The reasons for this position are environmental, economic and practical. The strength of feeling on this issue is also partly cultural as Australians love of the Ocean has created a strong empathy with these impressive mammals.

Environmentally, global whale populations are far from sustainable despite a 20 year moratorium on commercial whaling. Seven of the thirteen great whale species are still endangered or vulnerable, along with 17 small whale, dolphin and porpoise species or populations.³⁹

Due to centuries of over-exploitation, some species such as the North Atlantic right whale have been degraded to such an extent that even 70 years of protection have not produced any signs of recovery. Despite this fact, more than 25,000 whales have been hunted since the 1986 moratorium came into effect⁴⁰ and nearly 1,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises are killed every day as by-catch in fishing nets.⁴¹ Some of these losses have occurred in Australian waters.

As well as endangering the sustainability of whale populations, Australia's economic interests are threatened by whaling. Whale-watching generates an estimated \$300 million for our national economy through tourism, which would be a major loss of jobs and capital if the industry was threatened by reduced

whale numbers.⁴² At the risk of proffering gratuitous advice but I would suggest it is also a potentially lucrative industry for Japan.

Labor also believes that the scientific cull is entirely unnecessary. There are a number of other non-lethal data collection methods which are more reliable, such as genetic analysis of skin samples collected in a non-harmful biopsy dart.⁴³ Australia is attempting to play a lead role in developing non-harmful research techniques and these should form the basis of any future study.⁴⁴

On election a Labor government will pursue dialogue on these issues as a matter of priority.

Conclusion

Whilst disagreements between friends will arise from time to time, they will never detract from the overall relationship which is abundant with goodwill and future promise. All sides of Australian politics warmly anticipate the visit of Prime Minister Abe for APEC in September and, of course, his subsequent bilateral discussions.

It is particularly noteworthy that in September Mr Abe will be the first ever Japanese Prime Minister to address a joint sitting of the Australian Parliament. It will be a fitting testament to the fact that over the past half century Australia and Japan have together progressively developed something which serves as a truly great model for a modern interstate friendship.

Thank you.

ENDNOTES

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